DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 179 980 CS 205 330

AUTHOR Keroack, Elizabeth Carros; Marquis, Leah Keating
TITLE Futurism: Framework for Composition.
PUB DATE Oct 79
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Fall Conference of the New England Association of Teachers of English (Portsmouth, NH, October 19-21, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Composition (Literary); Curriculum Guides; English Curriculum; *English Instruction; *Futures (of Society); Language Arts; Science Fiction; Secondary Education; Teaching Guides; Units of Study; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

Noting that the study of the future has been neglected within the language arts framework, this paper proposes a curriculum unit that uses such study as a vehicle to develop composition skills. The paper provides the following information: the general objectives of the unit; evaluation methods; general humanistic themes to be studied; materials; and outlines of eight lessons covering seven change agents of the future: demographic shifts, ecological shifts, cultural diffusion, social innovation, technological innovation, cultural/value shifts, and information/idea shifts. (FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

FUTURISM: FRAMEWORK FOR COMPOSITION

Elizabeth Carros Keroack
Leah Keating Marquis

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Elizabeth Carros Keroack; Leah Keating Marquis
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Futurism: Framework For Composition

Teacher's Comments

Having finished the team-teaching of a lengthy composition course, we realized the need to develop a follow-up unit which would not only reinforce the writing skills students so recently acquired, but also motivate tired vocational high school juniors to continue to grow critically and creatively. We asked ourselves--what kind of high-interest curriculum could sustain students' interest in compositional process while strengthening their individual conceptual knowledge bases of the world around them?

The study of the future loomed as a topical possibility. After all, few students are totally disinterested in those events that will shape their lives in the years ahead, yet many are bored by the overused and inane compositional topics foisted on them by teacher desperation. If the occasionally successful shot-in-the-dark assignment proves, over time, to be unable to induce students to compose willingly and often, perhaps the study of the future (futurism) could constitute a viable alternative to failure. Or so we began to think.

After concentrated study of the concept of futurism, we judged it to be an excellent organizational tool for the instruction of composition. Its examination provides students with possible creative experience in all modes of writing--narration, information, exposition, and persuasion--thus allowing them to work at their individual developmental levels without fear of failure. Further, the study of the future integrates all of the language arts--speaking, listening, viewing, reading, and writing--and so fosters students' continued growth in skill areas not only used repeatedly in school endeavors, but also in the world outside the narrow confines of the classroom. Lastly and most importantly, as students create the content of the futurism course using themselves as resources, motivation and self-satisfaction abound.

Futurism: Framework For Composition

Overview

In 1970, Alvin Toffler revolutionized the attitude of a large segment of American society toward the future. Future Shock not only outlined the social and psychological effects of the technological revolution upon the present, but also warned of the massive collision bound to result when unprepared citizens found themselves overwhelmed by rapidly accelerating changes in their futures. It was little wonder that the book became in immediate best-seller, for it effectively crystallized the unspoken fears held for so long by many of the intellectual community and the public-at-large.

The shockwaves generated by Toffler's notions produced changes in the educational field, just as they did in business and industry. Social studies and science specialists particularly became interested in using the future as an organizing concept for preparing students to adapt to change in their lives. A number of courses using this theoretical framework were developed and taught on all levels. Many of these courses in social studies and science still exist; unfortunately, little has been done to implement the future as a structural tool within the English curriculum. Certainly science fiction units have become commonplace additions to the curriculum for some time, but the total treatment of the future within the Language Arts framework has been woefully neglected despite its enormous humanistic and practical value. Certainly this situation can be remedied through the implementation of a curriculum unit which uses futursim as a vehicle to further composition skills.

In 1971, writers and researchers working under the auspices of the Center for Adaptive Learning, Inc., developed a curriculum model for classroom study of the future. In Chapter Six of Alvin Toffler's collected essays Learning For Tomorrow (The Role of the Future in Education), Michael A. McDaniels gives a full outline and rationale of the proposed model, one based on student exploration of the seven major interrelated agents which initiate change in all societies. These agents--demographic shifts, ecological shifts, cultural diffusion, social innovation, technological innovation, cultural-value shifts, and information-idea shifts--comprise a carefully structured operational methodology for the study of change,

and as such involve students in mature interdisciplinary thinking. Implemented within a composition class, the futurism model allows students the opportunity to discuss, read, and compose from each of seven different perspectives, thus fostering valuable cumulative learning rather than merely the narrow linear variety which accompanies most topical analysis.

General Objectives

The student will:

1. draw upon areas of personal interest and authority in each writing attempt;
2. raise issues/ask questions/suggest answers concerning problems inherent in his/her exploration, both personal and social, of the future;
3. explore the function, organization, and composition of the five distinct writing modes;
4. peer group edit and self-edit classroom assignments;
5. develop a functional knowledge of the art of social and artistic criticism.

Evaluation

The stated objectives of this unit are evaluated on an individual basis using the following means:

1. class participation in those discussions and group presentations based on the seven major change agents of the future;
2. the preparation and completion of eleven writing assignments (to be graded by student adherence to assignment requirements)--

a. Personal Timeline
b. Societal Timeline
c. Population Proposal
d. Ecological Letter
e. Short Story
f. Personal Essay
g. Project Invention
h. Interview
i. Art Project
j. Journal
k. Formal Essay

Futurism: Framework For Composition

General Humanistic Themes

In order for the study of the future to reach its full potential, the following themes are stressed repeatedly throughout this composition-based unit--

1. The future is not an isolated phenomena; it is a proposed state which must be studied in reference to the past and the present.
2. The seven change agents that are explored are not entities which function only in and of themselves--they are rather catalysts of chain reactions which alter the shape of society and therefore the role of the individual.

Materials

Essays

Ehrlich, Paul. "World Population and the Future," Tomorrow. New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1973.

Swift, Jonathan. "A Modest Proposal," Essays. Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1971.

Stories

Bradbury, Ray. "The Smile," You and Science Fiction. Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Co., 1976.

Vonnegut, Kurt. "Harrison Bergeron," Welcome to The Monkey House. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1972.

Vonnegut, Kurt. "Welcome to The Monkey House," Welcome to The Monkey House. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1972.

Yarbo, Chelsea Quinn. "Frog Pond," You and Science Fiction. Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Co., 1976.

Books

Hollister, Bernard. You and Science Fiction. Skokie, Illinois: National Textbook Co., 1976.

Huxley, Aldous. Brave New World. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.

Orwell, George. 1984. New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1961.

Vonnegut, Kurt. Welcome to The Monkey House. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1972.

Magazines

The Futurist. Washington D.C.: World Future Society, 1978.

References

Jansen, H.W. The History of Art. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1963.

Moffet, James. Student Centered Language Arts and Reading, K-13. Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1976.

Toffler, Alvin. Future Shock. New York: Random House, 1971.

Toffler, Alvin. Learning for Tomorrow. New York: Random House, 1974.

Daily Lesson Plans and Activities

LESSON ONE (Introduction)

1. Detail the philosophy and makeup of the McDaniel's model of the future (see Overview).
2. Define, discuss, and solicit examples of each of the seven change agents upon which the model rests.
3. Catapult students into "future thinking" by having individuals construct Personal Time Lines (see Attachment 1).
4. Allow time for student exchange of in-process and completed timelines in order to facilitate their understanding of the many differing perspectives of the future.
5. Pair students for the purpose of their composing Societal Timelines (see Attachment 2) in which the seven elements of model are clearly, though generally, delineated.

LESSON TWO (Demographic Shifts)

1. Begin detailed exploration of the seven change agents of the future. First introduce the concept of demographic shifts, the various effects of population upon culture, as this agent frequently appears in students' Personal and Societal Timelines.
2. Read and discuss Jonathan Swift's satirical essay "A Modest Proposal."

3. Paul Ehrlich's essay "World Population and the Future" provides students with a modern perspective of the population problem.
4. From the awareness of the problems population has engendered in the past and present, students fashion Population Proposals (narrative form) which cite clear-cut means of resolving the population-related problems which loom for the future.

LESSON THREE (Ecological Shifts)

1. Invite an ecologically knowledgeable science instructor and/or local meteorologist to brief students on noteworthy past and present ecological shifts.
2. Question the effect of nuclear testing, space travel, non-biodegradable products, aerosol sprays and the like on ecological balance.
3. Students read "Frog Pond" by Chelsea Quinn Yarbo in order to promote discussion on the theme of man's adaptability to environmental change.
4. Students choose ecological issues of interest and draft letters to public officials, industry, and/or the press, stating the nature of their concerns and posing action for positive change.

LESSON FOUR (Cultural Diffusion)

1. Cultural diffusion is the transfer of values and concepts from one culture to another. Students are asked to compare their own culture's attitude toward family structure, male/female role images, and education with that of an alien culture.
2. Attention of television, movie, and travel magazine offerings helps students collect enough information to prepare a five-minute oral presentation of their findings.
3. Students use their findings to write individual short stories depicting the merger of the cultures studied; stories should stress the diffusion and/or disappearance of quintessential cultural elements.

LESSON FIVE (Social Innovation)

1. Define social innovation as any of the changes which occur over time in such social agencies and systems as education, politics, the economy, and the military.

2. Students group themselves according to expressed curiosity about the changes imminent in one of the aforementioned systems. Groups then research the future direction of the system of their choice in the school library.
3. Findings are synthesized into group statements which categorize the nature of the changes research indicates.
4. Individual students develop personal essays substantiating their feelings regarding the information discovered.

LESSON SIX (Technological Innovation)

1. Introduce the change agent of technological innovation by initiating a class discussion of history's most famous inventions--their creation, creators, and implications for the future.
2. Students list the twenty most significant inventions of all time and rate them in the order of their importance.
3. Pairs of students devise new inventions which must fulfill useful societal functions. Inventors must (1) state their rationale for the invention, (2) describe its appearance and method of operation, and (3) design two media presentations (commercials) to sell the product to the public (see Attachment 3). Student creativity and the concrete compositional skills of argument, description, direction-giving, and use of propaganda techniques are stressed in this assignment.

LESSON SEVEN (Cultural-value Shifts)

1. Teacher presents for discussion several controversial issues relating to the question of what constitutes individual rights and privileges in today's society. The laertrile controversy, censorship, euthanasia, and living wills are just a few issues which should foster lively debate on the effects of time on attitudes.
2. Read Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron," a short story which shows the individual's fight for identity in a despotic future society.
3. Discussion moves from the arena of the individual to that of the family as students are asked to examine their families' specific rituals and customs. How have these practices been altered by time and

circumstance?

4. Vonnegut's Welcome to the Monkey House propels students into discussion of moral suicide as an alternative of the future.
5. Students construct twenty-question interviews to be conducted upon people who exceed fifty years of age. Questions should reflect class discussion and student interest. The verbatim or paraphrased write-up of resulting interviews hones student transcription skills to a fine point.
6. Changes within the arts--literature, music, art--are a reflection of societal value structures and, as such, are valuable to note. While student familiarity with literature and music may preclude in-depth study in those areas, art provides a new genre of field-based study for most high school students.
7. The teacher arranges a class field trip to a local museum of fine arts. Before departure, students are given a brief introduction to the major art periods, styles, techniques, and artists to be viewed.
8. During the museum tour, students take notes on specially featured selections and all others which personally fascinate them.
9. Back in the classroom, students, in conjunction with the teacher, focus on one work to study further. Students research their chosen work of art, its artist, period, and attendant civilization. Students organize a paper based on their finding (see Attachment 4 for assignment specifics).
10. Students read Ray Bradbury's short story "The Smile" as an example of one prediction of the future of art in society.

LESSON EIGHT (Information-idea Shifts)

1. Information-idea shifts are all those discoveries of a natural and scientic nature which alter the course of history. Current experimentation in science, in general, and in medicine, in particular, is an excellent means by which to gauge the character of the future of mankind.
2. Teacher asks--Is a disease-free world possible? How long will it be before man reproduces himself synthetically? Do scientific researchers adhere to a moral code?--to generate discussion.
3. Students collect newspaper and magazine articles

related to class discussion. Compilation of materials results in student journals which include the articles themselves and short personal commentaries on the issues.

4. After journal completion, students construct a thesis statement on a scientific-medical issue of note and write a formal essay presenting information found on the subject. Restraint, fact-finding, and coordination of ideas are valuable outgrowths of this exercise.

Summary

If, as James Moffett clearly believes, the act of composing is analogous to that of thinking, then composition teachers cannot simply pontificate mechanics and style; they must, in fact, cultivate maturity in the thought processes of their students. Futurism helps them to do this and do it well. Working within the context of the model, students draw their conceptual visions of past and present knowledge into the future. The task is not an easy one, but it is infinitely worthwhile. As Toffler advocates in Learning for Tomorrow (page 13)--"The ultimate purpose of futurism in education is not to create complex, well-ordered, accurate images of the future, but to help learners cope with real life crises, opportunities, and perils." And isn't that what composition is all about?

Futurism: Framework For Composition

Supplementary Course Materials

Films

Art Is?, National Gallery of Art Extension Service, Washington, D.C. 20565. Free.

Innovation (American Enterprise #3), Phillips Petroleum Company, Modern Talking Pictures Service, 2523 New Hyde Road, New Hyde Park, New York 11040. Free.

1984, Audio Brandon Films, 34 MacQuesten Parkway S., Mt. Vernon, N.Y. 10550. Rental Fee: $30.00.

The River Must Live, Shell Oil Company, Shell Film Library, 1433 Sadlier Circle W. Dr., Indianapolis, Ind. 46239. Free.

The Time Machine (H.G. Wells novel), Films, Inc. 35-01 Queens Blvd., Long Island City, N.Y. 11101. Rental Fee: $35.00.

Two For Fox, Two For Crow, Association Films, Inc., Association Films Regional Center, 410 Great Road, Littleton, Ma. 01460. Free.

Who's Out There?, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Washington, D.C. 20546. Rental Fee: $117.25

Slide Lectures

Introduction to Understanding Art, National Gallery of Art Extension Service, Washington, D.C. 20565. Free.

700 Years of Art, National Gallery of Art Extension Service, Washington, D.C. 20565. Free.

U.S. Art--A Gift of Ourselves, Association Films, Inc., Association Films Regional Center, 410 Great Road, Littleton, Ma. 01460. Free.

Books

Aldiss, Brian W. Frankenstein Unbound. Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1975.

Ehrenfeld, David W. Biological Conservation. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1970.

Harrison, Harry and Pugner, Carol. A Science Fiction Reader. New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1973.

Kelley, Leo P. Themes in Science Fiction. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972.

Lucas, George. Star Wars. New York: Ballatine Books, 1976.

Madsen, Alan L. Tomorrow. New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1973.

Attachment #1

PERSONAL TIME LINE

1. Your time line should begin at your present age and continue until you die (your own death should be prophesied). If you die before you are seventy years old, you still must project the future until the year when you would have attained that age.

2. Work in intervals of five years (more detail is advised).

3. The effects that the following change agents have upon the lives of you, your family, and your friends should be considered--
    a. population
    b. technical innovation
    c. social innovation (systems--education, government, economy, and the military)
    d. culture and value shifts
    e. ecology
    f. knowledge acquisition
    g. cultural diffusion (the ideas of different cultures coming together--a nation without boundaries)

((Important dates concerning family births, deaths, marriages, investments, jobs, changes of jobs, schooling, acquisition of major pieces of property, should also be indicated on the line.))

4. Your projections should be probable or preferable, but not fantasized.

Two class periods to work on this assignment

Attachment #2

SOCIETY LINE

This line is to be constructed similarly to the personal time line. Only the changes and major events in society are to be recorded.

1. 75 year time span

2. Intervals of five years (more detail is advised).

3. Your projections should be probable or preferable, but not fantasized.

4. The following elements of society should be considered--
   a. population
   b. technical innovation
   c. social innovation (systems--education, government, economy, and the military)
   d. culture and value shifts
   e. ecology
   f. knowledge acquisition
   g. cultural diffusion (the ideas of different cultures coming together--a nation without boundaries)

Two class periods to work on this assignment

Attachment #3

PROJECT INVENTION

You are an inventor, a combination scientist and technologist. Consider your next project carefully. What is it that you will invent? Once you have an idea, develop it using the following format--

1. Illustrate and/or thoroughly describe the invention.

2. Explain its purpose for existence and the method of its functioning (in layman's terms).

3. Write two advertisements designed to "sell" your invention; one should be directed toward the written medium and the other toward the spoken.

4. Why did you create your invention? Does it change society in any way? If so, how? If not, why not?

5. Choose an invention already in existence that fascinates you. What is its use and attraction?

Attachment #4

CULTURE AND VALUES-WEEK TWO PROJECT

Art is a reflection of the culture and values of a particular society and civilization. It has been important to man since he first scratched primitive drawings of buffalo on cave walls thousands of years ago.

Select a piece of art from the museum visit, one which interests and attracts you. Record its name, the artist who created it, and the period of time to which it belongs. Describe the piece (be it painting, drawing, photograph, sculpture, furnishings, etc.) thoroughly--what does it look like? What is its subject: What theme or idea is conveyed? Comment on your immediate reactions to the work of art; how and why does it appeal to you?

Using designated library periods following the visit, do further research on your chosen item. Begin with a short study of the civilization from which it came (country, time of origin). How is it a reflection of that civilization's culture or values (what does it tell you about what was important to the people who created and admired it)? Which change agents are reflected in the artist's work? Go on to learn more about the artist. How are his/her interests or personality apparent in the art? How has your understanding been improved through this research?

Lastly, define "art." What do you believe it to be? Why? Project into the future to the year 3000. What one piece of art or one art form that is around today would be the best mirror of the 1900's? Explain your choice.

Suggested Structure of Project

I General Information
   a. name, artist, period
   b. description
   c. immediate reaction and explanation
II Research
   a. civilization
   b. reflection of culture
   c. artist's personality and message
   d. your understanding
III Art of the 1900's
   a. description of item
   b. explanation of choice
IV Personal Definition of Art